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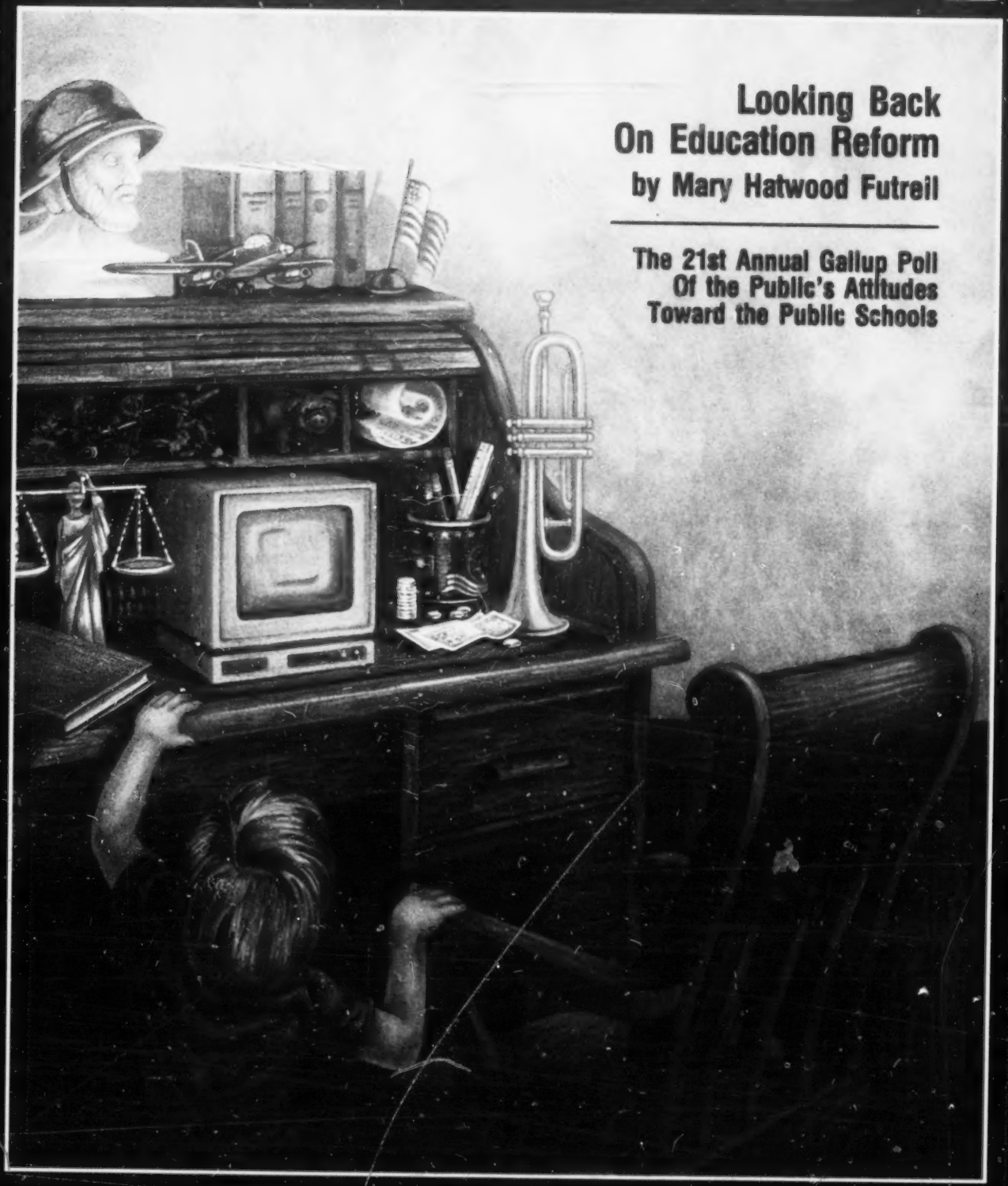
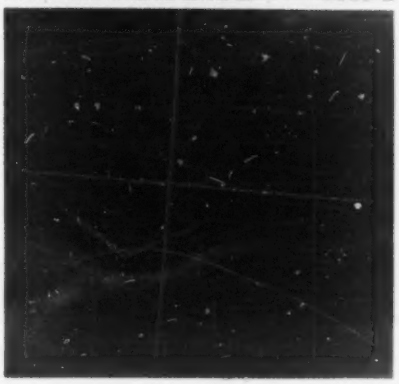


Looking Back On Education Reform

by Mary Hatwood Futrell

The 21st Annual Gallup Poll Of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools



Phi Delta September 1989 • Volume 71 • Number 1

KAPPAN

FEATURES

8 **Mission Not Accomplished: Education Reform in Retrospect,** *by Mary Hatwood Futrell*

15 **Demilitarizing Public Education: School Reform in the Era of George Bush,** *by Thomas R. McDaniel*

19 **Reform in Soviet and American Education: Parallels and Contrasts,** *by Stephen T. Kerr*

29 **American Textbook Reform: What Can We Learn from the Soviet Experience?,** *by Howard D. Mehlinger*

36 **A Teacher Development Model for Classroom Management,** *by Thomas J. Lasley*

39 **School Order and Safety as Community Issues,** *by Julius Menacker, Ward Weldon, and Emanuel Hurwitz*

41 **The 21st Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools,** *by Stanley M. Elam and Alec M. Gallup*

57 **Assertive Discipline – More Than Names on the Board and Marbles in a Jar,** *by Lee Canter*

61 **Save the Baby! A Response to 'Integrating the Children of the Second System,'** *by Glenn A. Vergason and M. L. Anderegg*

64 **A Rebuttal to Vergason and Anderegg: Who Benefits from Segregation and Murky Water?,** *by Margaret C. Wang, Maynard C. Reynolds, and Herbert J. Walberg*

68 **It's a Good Score! Just a Bad Grade,** *by Robert Lynn Canady and Phyllis Riley Hotchkiss*

72 **Let's Again Talk Sense About Our Schools,** *by John Georgeoff*

74 **On Alienation and the ESL Student,** *by Laura Carey*

DEPARTMENTS

3 **THE EDITOR'S PAGE,** No Matter How You Slice It

4 **WASHINGTON COMMENTARY,** *by Anne C. Lewis*

6 **STATELINE,** *by Chris Pipho*

55 **PASSING THOUGHTS,** *by Jim Sutton*

76 **RESEARCH,** *by Gerald W. Bracey*

80 **DE JURE,** Is There a Liability Insurance Crisis?, *by Perry A. Zirkel*

82 **IN EUROPE,** Primary Education, *by Michael G. Bruce*

84 **PROTOTYPES,** Blah Na Na! For the Blahs, *by John Marshall Carter*

85 **BOOKS,** *Laurence D. Brown*

87 **BACKTALK**

Cover Illustration: Dianne McElwain

No Matter How You Slice It

DICHOTOMIZING often enables us to think about complex topics in fresh and interesting ways. And, since education is as complex as any human endeavor, educators are masters of dichotomy. Cognitive/affective, traditional/progressive, centralized/decentralized, competitive/cooperative – the list grows continually. Two articles in this month's *Kappan* are cases in point.

Mary Hatwood Futrell leads off with a retrospective look at school reform since 1983, when she took office as president of the National Education Association just months after the release of *A Nation at Risk*. In Futrell's view, early reform efforts following the publication of that report sprang from a view of education as an *instrumental* value – a means of furthering such national interests as military security, economic competitiveness in the international marketplace, and harmony among disparate groups in an increasingly pluralistic population.

Americans, Futrell says, are only now coming to view education as an *intrinsic* value, as well – as a means of preparing tomorrow's adults to meet *ethical* imperatives. The world of tomorrow, she warns us, will "demand zealous compassion as much as competitive zeal." Add *instrumental/intrinsic* to the list.

By contrast, the dichotomy on which Thomas McDaniel focuses has to do with conflicting metaphors. During the Reagan Presidency, according to McDaniel, a tall-in-the-saddle, militaristic metaphor colored our attempts to reform the schools. But now a kinder, gentler – if you will, a more feminine – metaphor could help us to mend tears in the social fabric. Add *masculine/feminine* to the list.

The July 1989 issue of *Harper's* alluded to yet another dichotomy that demands our attention. In its "Readings" column, that magazine published an essay by Richard Rorty, adapted from an address he delivered last January to the American Association of Colleges. Rorty argues that the *goals* of education are dual. The primary and secondary schools are charged with socializing students: getting them "to take over the moral and political common sense of the society as it is." But, according to Rorty, students who go on to attend "reasonably good colleges" then learn to be "skeptical about the current consensus." In other words, educators socialize first and then work to remove the limits that socialization imposes. Add *socialization/individuation* to the list.

"With a bit of help," Rorty says, college students "will start noticing everything that is paltry and mean and unfree in their surroundings. With luck, the best of them will succeed in altering the conventional wisdom, so that the next generation is socialized in a somewhat different way than they themselves were socialized." To hope that this way will be "perceptibly different is to hope that our country never becomes satisfied with itself," he concludes.

I confess to misgivings about Rorty's implicit – and elitist – assumption that only the college-educated ought to be able to stand up to their own pasts. *Socialization/individuation* is a dichotomy that probably ought to influence the thinking of teachers at every level.

Clearly though, no matter how you slice it, education is the one best hope for our individual and collective progress and well-being. That's something to bear in mind as we head into a new school year. Oh, by the way, add *individual/collective* to the list. – PBG

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PHI DELTA KAPPAN

USPS 429-840

(ISSN 0031-7217) Published monthly, except July and August, by Phi Delta Kappa, Inc., Eighth & Union, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402. Subscription rate, $30 per year, domestic, $32.50 per year, foreign. Single copies $3.50 each; remit with order. Indexed in *Education Index* and in *Current Index to Journals in Education*; available on microfilm: University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Mich. Second-class postage paid at Bloomington, Ind., and at additional mailing offices. *Postmaster*: Send address changes to *Phi Delta Kappan*, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402.

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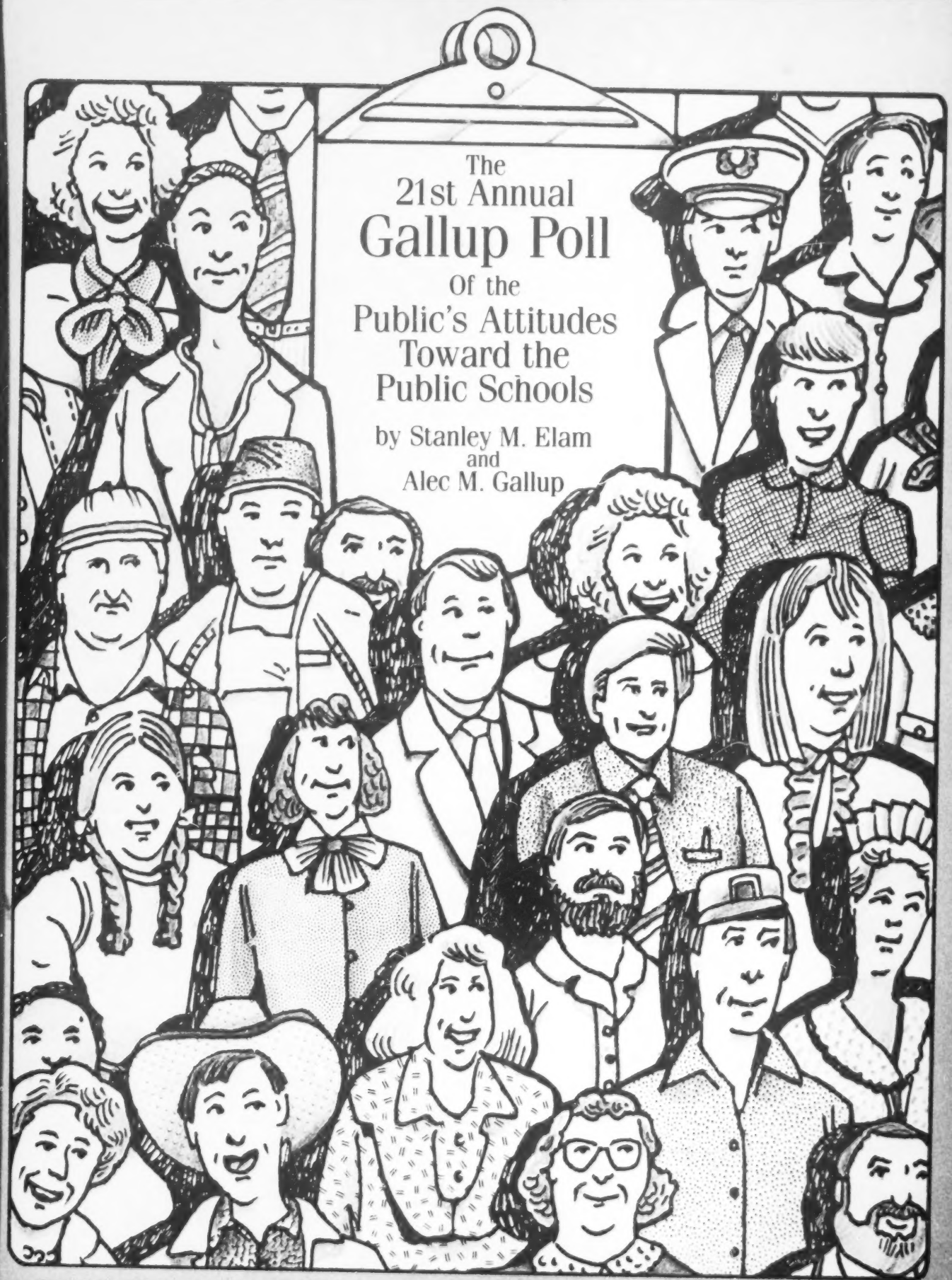
Address all purchase orders and address changes to Director of Administrative Services. Allow six weeks for processing address changes. Address all editorial correspondence to *Phi Delta Kappan*, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402. Ph. 812/339-1156. Please include postpaid, self-addressed envelope.



The 21st Annual Gallup Poll Of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

by Stanley M. Elam
and
Alec M. Gallup

Illustration by Roger T. Dr Mah

THE PUBLIC is ready for tradition-shattering changes in the policies that govern U.S. public schools. This interpretation of the results of the 21st annual Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa poll of public attitudes is inescapable. Among the findings that support it are these:

1. The public favors, by a 2-1 margin, allowing students and their parents to choose which public schools in their communities the students will attend. This is an aspect of the so-called parental choice movement, and it is already state law in Minnesota, Arkansas, and Iowa, while several other states are considering it in one form or another. Parental choice is also a centerpiece of the federal education policy articulated by the Bush Administration. The idea is especially popular among nonwhites and younger adults. Many people think that the option to choose their schools would improve students' satisfaction and achievement. Apparently, respondents to the 1989 survey are not much impressed by the argument that many schools would suffer from this tradition-breaking change.

2. A consensus appears to be building for more uniformity in public school programs. In the 1989 survey the public supports, by a substantial margin, the idea of a "standardized national curriculum," as well as national standards and goals for the public schools and nationally standardized tests to measure the achievement of those standards and goals. People seem willing to trust educators, perhaps working with lay panels, to establish these goals and prepare tests to measure their achievement.

3. A convincing 83% of the public think that more should be done to improve the quality of public schools in poorer states and communities. By a 2-1 margin, they say that they are even willing to pay more taxes to make this improvement possible.

4. The public favors (by 75% to 18%) reducing class size in the early grades to as few as 15 pupils. By a 68% to 25% margin, respondents say that they are willing to pay higher taxes to fund such reductions.

5. The public favors (by 71% to 21%) after-school and summer programs for students whose parents work. They are divided, however, on whether these programs should be financed by taxation, by parent contributions, or by some combination of the two.

6. People are deeply concerned about what they perceive to be the declining quality of the nation's inner-city schools; 74% think it is "very important" to improve them, and substantial majorities would be willing to pay more taxes to expand Head Start programs, to screen young children for health problems, and to provide day care for the children of working parents.

7. An overwhelming 83% of the respondents favor more state and federal assistance for high school graduates who have the ability and desire to attend college but cannot afford to do so. Respondents want more scholarships and grants, more work/study programs, and more low-interest loans.

Public approval of change was not indiscriminate in the current poll, however. For example, many people remain skeptical about the desirability of increasing the amount of time students spend in school, whether by lengthening the school day or the school year. In addition, rather than allow students to drop out of school as soon as they meet certain standards of knowledge and skill, the largest number of respondents would prefer to have students remain through high school graduation.

Two questions are standard in the Gallup education surveys. First, what are the biggest problems with which the schools in this community must deal? And second, what grade would you give the public schools in this community — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

The public perception of local school problems and the ratings given public schools in the 1989 survey vary little from last year. Use of drugs, lack of student discipline, and lack of proper financial support again head the list of problems. The proportion of poll respondents who gave their local schools grades of A or B rose from 40% last year to 43% in this year's survey, up from a low of 31% in 1983, the year in which *A Nation at Risk* was published. That report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education warned of "a rising tide of mediocrity" and triggered the current reform movement.

Details of the 1989 Gallup education poll follow.

Support for Parental Choice

Among various proposals for school restructuring being considered by the nation's policy makers, one of the most frequently mentioned is parental choice. For this reason, four questions were asked in the current poll that sought to measure public attitudes toward the idea and toward the reasoning behind it.

Majority support for parental choice appears in all demographic groups and in all geographic areas, although that support is somewhat stronger among nonwhites (67%) and younger adults (67%) than among whites (59%) and persons aged 50 and over (51%). People in eastern states regard parental choice less favorably than those in the West (53% to 64%).

Half of the respondents to the current poll believe that parental choice would improve some schools while hurting others; 21% think that parental choice would improve *all* schools. Only 14% think that choice would hurt *all* schools.

Opponents argue that parental choice might benefit students of caring and ambitious parents but that the children of apathetic parents — those already most at risk — would be the ultimate losers as the quality of poorer schools declined further. But many poll respondents felt that student achievement and satisfaction would, on the average, be higher than at present.

STANLEY M. ELAM (Indiana University Chapter) is contributing editor of the Phi Delta Kappan. *He was* Kappan *editor from 1956 through 1980 and has been coordinating Phi Delta Kappa's polling program since his retirement. ALEC M. GALLUP is co-chairman, with George Gallup, Jr., of the Gallup Organization, Princeton, N.J.*

Illustrations by Roger T. Dr Mark

The first question:

Do you favor or oppose allowing students and their parents to choose which public schools in this community the students attend, regardless of where they live?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	60	58	64	69
Oppose	31	33	29	22
Don't know	9	9	7	10

A question on parental choice was asked in the Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa survey conducted in 1987. However, the wording was somewhat different, and this difference probably accounts for the somewhat different response. The 1987 question:

Do you think that parents in this community should or should not have the right to choose which local schools their children attend?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes	71	68	78	81
No	20	20	21	15
Don't know	9	12	3	4

Further breakdowns for the 1989 question:

	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
NATIONAL TOTALS	60	31	9
Sex			
Men	60	32	8
Women	61	30	9
Race			
White	59	33	8
Nonwhite	67	22	11
Age			
18 - 29 years	67	24	9
30 - 49 years	64	29	7
50 and over	51	36	11
Community Size			
1 million and over	59	30	11
500,000 - 999,999	52	34	14
50,000 - 499,999	64	31	5
2,500 - 49,999	64	33	3
Under 2,500	59	31	10
Education			
College	60	33	7
Graduate	58	36	6
Incomplete	61	32	7
High school	62	28	10
Graduate	60	29	11
Incomplete	65	26	9
Grade school	54	33	13
Income			
$40,000 and over	62	32	6
$30,000 - $39,999	64	29	7
$20,000 - $29,999	59	33	8
$10,000 - $19,999	60	28	12
Under $10,000	61	30	9
Region			
East	53	39	8
Midwest	60	31	9
South	63	27	10
West	64	27	9

The second question:

What effect do you think allowing students and their parents to choose the students' schools would have on the public schools in this community? Do you think it would improve all the schools, hurt all the schools, or would it improve some and hurt others?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Improve all schools	21	19	24	25
Hurt all schools	14	14	14	13
Improve some, hurt others	51	51	51	55
Don't know	14	16	11	7

The third question:

If students and their parents were allowed to choose the students' schools, do you think student achievement in the public schools in this community, on the average, would be higher than it is now, lower than it is now, or wouldn't there be much difference?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Higher	40	39	42	51
Lower	10	11	8	8
Not much difference	42	42	43	33
Don't know	8	8	7	8

The fourth question:

If students and their parents were allowed to choose the students' schools, do you think student satisfaction with the public schools in this community, on the average, would be higher than it is now, lower than it is now, or wouldn't there be much difference?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Higher	49	48	53	57
Lower	7	7	6	8
Not much difference	37	38	35	32
Don't know	7	7	6	3

Support for National Goals, Standards, Curriculum, and Testing

Public opinion in these annual polls has generally supported the American tradition of local control of schools. For example, a 2-1 majority said in 1978 that federal regulations were more likely to hinder than to help the local schools. In 1982 a majority of respondents (54%) said that in the future they would like to see less federal influence on local educational programs. When the question was repeated in 1986, the results were almost identical. These sentiments may still hold, but the current poll reveals that a majority of respondents believe there should be a national public school curriculum, national goals and standards, and a national testing program to measure the achievement of those goals and standards.

These attitudes appear in the responses to several questions that were preceded by queries to determine whether respondents understood that we currently have no unified national goals, standards, or testing. People who said that they favored national goals and standards were also asked what groups should establish them. The responses show that the public places considerable confidence in professional educators to do so.

The first question:

As you understand it, do achievement standards and goals for the public schools differ from community to community and from state to state, or is there a single set of national achievement standards and goals that apply to all the public schools in the country?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Different goals	61	60	63	72
Single set of goals	24	23	26	12
Don't know	15	17	11	16

The second question:

Would you favor or oppose requiring the public schools in this community to conform to national achievement standards and goals?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	70	68	72	80
Oppose	19	19	20	14
Don't know	11	13	8	6

The third question (asked of those who favor national standards and goals):

Which one of the following groups do you think should establish these national achievement standards and goals: the President and Congress, professional educators, a consensus of state governors, or a panel of parents and other laypeople?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Professional educators	61	61	61	59
Panel of parents and other laypeople	20	19	22	23
The President and Congress	5	6	3	8
A consensus of state governors	3	3	2	2
Other	3	3	4	*
None	1	1	*	2
Don't know	7	7	8	6

*Less than one-half of 1%.

The fourth question:

As you understand it, do public school curriculum requirements — that is, the subjects required — differ from state to state and from community to community, or is there a standardized national curriculum that is required in all public schools in the country?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Differ	55	55	54	64
Standardized	29	28	33	23
Don't know	16	17	13	13

The fifth question:

Would you favor or oppose requiring the public schools in this community to use a standardized national curriculum?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	69	67	74	75
Oppose	21	21	20	18
Don't know	10	12	6	7

The sixth question:

As you understand it, do testing programs to determine the academic achievement of students differ from state to state and from community to community, or are there standardized testing programs that are required in all public schools in the country?

Illustrations by Roger T. De Mark

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Differ	38	40	35	37
Standardized	42	39	49	49
Don't know	20	21	16	14

The seventh question:

Would you favor or oppose requiring the public schools in this community to use standardized national testing programs to measure the academic achievement of students?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	77	75	81	80
Oppose	14	15	13	17
Don't know	9	10	6	3

Remedying Inequality in Educational Opportunity

One of the longest-running scandals in U.S. public education is the inequality of educational opportunity resulting from the unequal distribution of economic resources among the governmental units that support schools. By and large, court actions designed to correct these educational inequities (e.g., *Serrano* and *Rodriguez*) have failed. Over the past decade or so, many states have taken legislative action to improve their equalization formulas, but district-to-district and state-to-state inequities persist.

A convincing majority of the public (83%) believes that more should be done to improve the quality of the public schools in poorer states and communities. Of this 83%, 62% (just over half of all respondents) say they would be willing to pay more taxes for the purpose.

The first question:

The quality of the public schools varies greatly from community to community and from state to state because of differences in the amount of taxes taken in to support the schools. Do you think more should be done to improve the quality of the public schools in the poorer states and in the poorer communities or not?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes	83	82	86	85
No	9	9	8	7
Don't know	8	9	6	8

The second question (asked of those who think more should be done):

Would you be willing or not willing to pay more taxes to improve the quality of the public schools in the poorer states and poorer communities?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Willing	62	62	62	58
Not willing	30	29	32	27
Don't know	8	9	6	15

Reducing Class Size

Although the findings of research remain unclear, most laypeople believe the broad generalization that students achieve much more when class sizes are small. They are highly supportive of new state initiatives designed to reduce class size to as few as 15 pupils in the early grades.

The first question:

In some school districts, the typical class has as many as 35 students; in other districts, only 20. With regard to the achievement or progress of students, do you think small classes make a great deal of difference, little difference, or no difference at all?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Great deal of difference	79	77	82	88
Little difference	13	14	12	8
No difference	6	6	5	5
Don't know	2	3	1	1

	National Totals		
	1989 %	1988 %	1973 %
Great deal of difference	79	71	79
Little difference	13	21	11
No difference	6	6	6
Don't know	2	2	4

The second question:

A few states have started programs in the early grades to reduce class size to as few as 15 pupils. Would you favor or oppose such programs in the public schools in this community?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	75	73	81	82
Oppose	18	19	14	10
Already have such a program	1	1	1	1
Don't know	6	7	4	7

The third question (asked of those who favor restricting class size to as few as 15 students in the early grades):

Would you be willing to pay higher taxes to fund such programs or not?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes	68	66	72	71
No	25	26	24	20
Don't know	7	8	4	9

Support for After-School and Summer Programs

A sizable majority (71%) of respondents favor more after-school and summer programs for students whose parents work. Not many people, however, believe that these programs should be supported by increased taxes alone. They prefer some combination of government and parent contributions.

The first question:

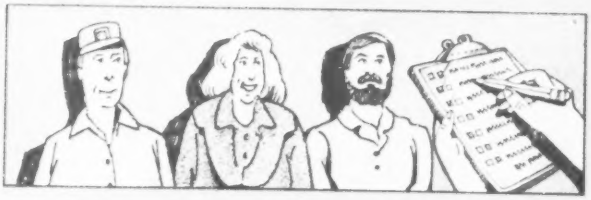
Would you favor or oppose having more after-school and summer programs in the local public schools for those students whose parents work?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	71	70	77	69
Oppose	21	21	18	27
Don't know	8	9	5	4

The second question (asked of those who favor more after-school and summer programs):

How do you think such programs should be paid for — by increased taxes, by contributions from the parents of those student involved, or by both increased taxes and parent contributions?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Increased taxes	15	16	14	11
Parent contributions	23	24	20	23
Increased taxes/parent contributions	57	55	60	63
Don't know	5	5	6	3



School-Site Management And Accountability

Some advocates of school restructuring would give building principals more authority for the operation of their schools and then hold them responsible for results. The public favors such proposals.

The question:

It has been suggested that school principals be given more authority to determine who will teach in their schools and how the schools will operate. In return, a principal given such authority would be held accountable for the school's performance; that is, after several years he or she would be rewarded if the school was educationally successful but replaced if the school did not meet established standards. Would you favor or oppose the adoption of this program in the public schools in this community?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	63	62	64	64
Oppose	26	26	26	24
Don't know	11	12	10	12

Because a few major school districts are experimenting with giving additional authority to parents, the parents of public school students were asked how much say they should have over several aspects of school operation. They expressed the opinion that parents should indeed have more say than they now do, particularly over the allocation of funds.

The question:

Do you feel that parents of public school students should have more say, less say, or do they have about the right amount of say regarding the following areas in public schools?

Illustrations by Roger T. Dr Mah

	More Say 1989 %	Less Say 1989 %	Right Amount 1989 %	Don't Know 1989 %
Allocation of school funds	59	10	27	4
Curriculum (i.e., the courses offered)	53	9	36	2
Selection and hiring of administrators	46	14	37	3
Books and instructional materials	43	13	41	3
Selection and hiring of teachers	41	17	38	4
Teacher and administrator salaries	39	17	39	5
Books placed in the school libraries	38	15	44	3

Criteria for Leaving School

Schooling to a certain age is required by law in every state, and the public is relatively well-informed about the requirements. However, there is little agreement about when a student *should* be allowed to drop out of school — at a minimum age, upon graduation from high school, or when certain standards of knowledge and skill have been met. Minimum age turns out to be the least-approved criterion. Three questions in the current poll probed the public's knowledge and opinion on this subject.

The first question:

Do you happen to know when students can legally drop out of school in this state? Does it depend on a minimum age, on whether the student has graduated from high school, or on the student's ability to meet certain standards of knowledge and skill?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Minimum age	70	70	71	65
Graduated from high school	6	6	6	5
Can meet standards	6	6	7	11
Don't know	18	18	16	19

The second question (asked of those who were aware of the minimum-age criterion):

Do you happen to know the minimum age at which a student can legally drop out of school in this state?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Yes	87	87	87	83
Don't know	13	13	13	17

The third question:

If you could choose one of these three plans, when do you think students should be allowed to drop out of school in this state? When they reach a minimum age, when they have graduated from high school, or when they have met certain standards of knowledge and skill?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Graduated from high school	45	46	45	40
Met certain standards	38	36	42	41
Minimum age	13	13	10	13
Don't know	4	5	3	6

Educational Influences on the Young

Educators often debate the strength and value of various educational influences on the young. A two-part question intended to reveal public perceptions of four of these influences was devised for the current poll. The public agrees that family influence is most important, as well as most positive, but the schools are a close second. The influence of peers and of television rank third and fourth in both strength and value. Television — a favorite scapegoat — gets a very low rating as a "positive influence."

The first question:

In addition to school, young people receive their education from a number of different sources. As I read off these sources, one at a time, would you indicate how important an influence you think each source is on a student by mentioning a number between zero and 10 — the higher the number, the more important the influence; and the lower the number, the less important.

	Most Important Influence (Ratings of 9 and 10 only) %
The student's family	63
School	47
The student's peers	41
Television	32

The second question:

Now, as I read off each of these sources, one at a time, would you tell me how *positive* an influence you think each source is on a student by mentioning a number between zero and 10 — the higher the number, the more positive the influence; and the lower the number, the less positive.

	Most Positive Influence (Ratings of 9 and 10 only) %
The student's family	53
School	39
The student's peers	24
Television	13

Why People Prize Education

These polls have repeatedly shown how important people believe education to be for success in life. To reveal detailed reasons why people want their children to receive an education, an open-ended question first asked in 1986 was repeated this year. The pragmatic bent of the American mind is immediately apparent in the responses. A primary concern for most parents is that their children be able to get good jobs and achieve financial security, and they believe that education will make these things possible. They consider knowledge for its own sake, good citizenship, and critical thinking skills secondary.

The question:

People have different reasons why they want their children to get an education. What are the chief reasons that come to your mind?

	National Totals	
	1989 %	1986 %
Job opportunities/better job	33	34
Preparation for life/better life	25	23
Financial security/economic stability	15	9
More knowledge	9	10
To get a better-paying job	8	8
To become self-sufficient (independent)	7	3
Personal development/self-realization	7	3
Teaches a person to think/learn/understand	6	3
Education is a necessity of life	5	12
To become better citizens	5	6
For a successful life	5	5
Specialized training/profession	4	4
To learn how to get along with people	4	4
To learn basic skills/fundamental learning skills	4	3
For better/easier life than parents	3	4
To contribute to society	2	3
To develop the ability to deal with adult responsibilities	2	2
Creates opportunities/opens doors	2	2
Social status	1	1
For happy/happier life	1	2
To develop basic individual values	1	1
To develop an understanding of and appreciation for culture	1	1
To develop self-discipline	1	1
Helps keep children out of trouble	*	1
To develop critical thinking skills	*	1
Miscellaneous	*	2
Don't know	2	4

*Less than one-half of 1%.
(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple answers.)

Longer School Day and Year

In 1982, when people were first asked about extending the public school year in their communities by 30 days or the school day by one hour, they opposed both suggestions. They opposed a longer year by 53% to 37%, and they opposed a longer day by 58% to 38%. By 1984 the opposition was somewhat weaker: 50% opposed to 44% in favor of the longer year; 52% opposed to 42% in favor of the longer day.

Although the question asked in this year's survey was phrased somewhat differently,* the responses suggest that opposition continues to dwindle. For the first time in the Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa polls, more people favor than oppose increasing the amount of time students in their communities spend in school, but no decisive majority opinion has emerged; 48% favor increased time in school, while 44% oppose it. Support is widely distributed among demographic and geographic groups, with some interesting differences. Men, for example, are somewhat more supportive of the idea than are women. People in larger cities are more likely to support it than are people in small communities or rural areas. And many more respondents in the West than in the East favor the idea.

The first question:

In some nations students spend about 25% more time in school than do students in the U.S. Would you favor or oppose increasing the amount of time that students in this community spend in school?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	48	48	46	54
Oppose	44	43	48	40
Don't know	8	9	6	6

*The 1982 and 1984 wording: "In some nations, students attend school as many as 240 days a year as compared to 180 days in the U.S. How do you feel about extending the public school year in this community by 30 days, making the school year about 210 days or 10 months long? How do you feel about extending the school day in the schools in this community by one hour?"

Illustrations by Roger T. Du Mont

Further breakdowns:

	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
NATIONAL TOTALS	48	44	8
Sex			
Men	50	41	9
Women	46	47	7
Race			
White	48	44	8
Nonwhite	49	43	8
Age			
18 - 29 years	38	53	9
30 - 49 years	47	46	7
50 and over	54	36	10
Community Size			
1 million and over	52	37	11
500,000 - 999,999	61	29	10
50,000 - 499,999	46	46	8
2,500 - 49,999	44	53	3
Under 2,500	42	52	6
Education			
College	53	39	8
Graduate	52	41	7
Incomplete	54	38	8
High school	43	49	8
Graduate	45	47	8
Incomplete	38	53	9
Grade school	47	44	9
Income			
$40,000 and over	50	44	6
$30,000 - $39,999	56	42	3
$20,000 - $29,999	47	46	7
$10,000 - $19,999	45	43	12
Under $10,000	41	51	8
Region			
East	48	41	11
Midwest	43	49	8
South	43	49	8
West	61	34	5

Respondents who favor increasing the amount of time students spend in school were asked which plan they prefer: more days, more hours per day, or Saturday morning classes. Sentiment was equally divided between the first two alternatives. Few people like the idea of Saturday morning classes.

The second question:

Which *one* of these plans for increasing the amount of time students spend in school would you prefer? Increasing the number of days in the school year, increasing the number of hours in the school day, or having school on Saturday mornings?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Increasing number of days	48	44	49	62
Increasing number of hours per day	45	47	44	27
Saturday morning school	6	5	6	11
Don't know	3	4	1	*

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Concern About Inner-City Schools

In general, the public is aware of the decline in the quality of education in the nation's inner cities in recent decades. People attach a high priority to improving inner-city schools; almost no one thinks that attacking this problem is unimportant.

The first question:

Thinking about the nation's inner-city schools, is it your impression that they have improved, gotten worse, or stayed about the same over the last several decades?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Improved	12	11	13	15
Gotten worse	57	58	56	53
Stayed about the same	20	19	20	22
Don't know	11	12	11	10

The second question:

How important do you think it is to improve the nation's inner-city schools — very important, fairly important, not very important, or not important at all?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Very important	74	71	83	83
Fairly important	19	21	14	14
Not very important	2	2	*	1
Not important at all	*	*	*	*
Don't know	5	6	3	2

*Less than one-half of 1%.

"I opined on your behalf today. You now support tax increases."

Grading the Public Schools

Public schools held their own in the ratings game this year. In the past five years, no statistically significant differences have appeared in the grades people give their local public schools or in the grades they give the public schools nationally.

Once again residents of large cities and nonwhites give schools the poorest grades. The decline in the quality of the schools that serve inner-city residents and minorities is a problem that should be high on the agenda of education policy makers.

Those who follow these polls are aware of three phenomena that recur annually in ratings tabulations. First, public school parents rate local schools more favorably than do other groups. Second, parents rate the school *their oldest child attends* even more favorably (about seven out of 10 of these ratings are either an A or a B). And third, the public as a whole rates its local public schools much more favorably than it rates the public schools nationwide.

A number of hypotheses are suggested by these facts. Perhaps the most obvious is that the more firsthand knowledge one has about the public schools (i.e., knowledge that does not come from the media), the better one likes them. This is a rare case of familiarity breeding respect.

The first question:

Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and FAIL to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the *public* schools themselves, in this community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A & B	43	38	57	35
A	8	7	13	4
B	35	31	44	31
C	33	34	29	36
D	11	11	11	14
FAIL	4	5	2	7
Don't know	9	12	1	8

Ratings Given the Local Public Schools

	1989 %	1988 %	1987 %	1986 %	1985 %	1984 %	1983 %	1982 %	1981 %	1980 %	1979 %
A+B	43	40	43	41	43	42	31	37	36	35	34
A	8	9	12	11	9	10	6	8	9	10	8
B	35	31	31	30	34	32	25	29	27	25	26
C	33	34	30	28	30	35	32	33	34	29	30
D	11	10	9	11	10	11	13	14	13	12	11
FAIL	4	4	4	5	4	4	7	5	7	6	7
Don't know	9	12	14	15	13	8	17	11	10	18	18

Further breakdowns:

Grading the Local Public Schools

	A %	B %	C %	D %	FAIL %	Don't Know %
NATIONAL TOTALS	8	35	33	11	4	9
Sex						
Men	9	33	34	11	4	9
Women	8	35	32	11	4	10
Race						
White	9	36	32	10	4	9
Nonwhite	5	25	37	17	6	10
Age						
18 - 29 years	6	30	41	11	6	6
30 - 49 years	10	35	34	13	3	5
50 and over	7	37	27	9	4	16
Community Size						
1 million and over	8	28	33	14	7	10
500,000 - 999,999	8	27	36	14	4	11
50,000 - 499,999	8	39	32	9	2	10
2,500 - 49,999	7	43	27	13	3	7
Under 2,500	9	38	34	8	3	8
Education						
College	9	38	31	10	4	8
Graduate	13	40	28	8	3	8
Incomplete	7	37	32	11	5	8
High school	6	32	36	13	5	8
Graduate	6	34	36	14	4	6
Incomplete	7	28	35	10	6	14
Grade school	10	23	31	12	4	20
Income						
$40,000 and over	12	38	29	9	6	6
$30,000 - $39,999	11	32	40	8	2	7
$20,000 - $29,999	7	34	29	17	5	8
$10,000 - $19,999	6	34	38	8	4	10
Under $10,000	6	29	34	11	4	16
Region						
East	6	41	31	9	5	8
Midwest	10	30	36	13	4	7
South	9	32	33	11	4	11
West	7	35	31	12	4	11

The second question:

How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
A & B	22	22	24	15
A	2	2	2	1
B	20	20	22	14
C	47	46	47	52
D	15	15	15	14
FAIL	4	5	3	4
Don't know	12	12	11	15

The third question:

Using the A, B, C, D, FAIL scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends?

	1989 %	1988 %	1987 %	1986 %	1985 %
A & B	71	70	69	65	71
A	25	22	28	28	23
B	46	48	41	37	48
C	19	22	20	25	19
D	5	3	5	4	5
FAIL	1	2	2	2	2
Don't know	4	3	4	3	3

Illustrations by Roger T. Dr Mah

Required Community Service

Community service for high school credit is sometimes offered as a corrective for the excessive self-centeredness of adolescents. President Bush has expressed his approval of the idea. When a question on this topic was first asked in the 1978 survey, the question implied that community service would be an option, not a requirement, and approval was very high (87% for, 8% against). In 1984 the same question brought a high level of approval (79% for, 16% against).

In the current poll, the public was asked if community service should be made a *requirement* for high school graduation. Although there is less support for the requirement than there was for the elective, a majority of respondents still approve (61% for, 30% against).

The question:

Would you favor or oppose a requirement that all students in the local public schools perform some kind of community service in order to graduate?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	61	60	63	69
Oppose	30	30	32	25
Don't know	9	10	5	6

Part-Time Work by High School Students

In a study sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa in 1986,* 70% of a representative sample of U.S. high school seniors reported that they held paid part-time jobs outside the home while attending school. Nearly 40% worked between 11 and 25 hours per week at these jobs, and 37% reported that they earned between $50 and $125 per week. The more paid hours students worked, the lower the grades they received in school. This finding neither proves nor implies a cause-and-effect relationship, but it is nonetheless disturbing.

What, if anything, should be the schools' response to such findings? To obtain the public's view, four questions were asked in the current survey. Some 43% of the respondents believe that holding part-time jobs hurts the academic achievement of high school students. (Interestingly, however, some 28% of the *parents* of public high school students think part-time jobs actually *help* achievement.) A solid majority would like to see school authorities make recommendations about the kind of out-of-school jobs that students should take and about the number of hours that they should devote to them. Half of the respondents think that the schools should offer courses at odd hours for the convenience of working students. And a very large majority think that schools should give academic credit in certain courses for the work experience of students.

The first question:

Many high school students now work long hours at jobs outside of school. What effect do you think this has on their academic achievement — do you think this usually hurts their academic achievement, usually helps their academic achievement, or doesn't it make much difference?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Hurts	43	43	45	42
Helps	29	28	28	36
Not much difference	23	23	23	18
Don't know	5	6	4	4

The second question:

Do you think the public high schools in this community should or should not make recommendations to high school students about the kinds of outside jobs they should take and the number of hours they should work?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Should	62	62	62	69
Should not	32	31	33	28
Don't know	6	7	5	3

The third question:

Do you think the public high schools in this community should or should not offer duplicate courses in the afternoon and at night for working students?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Should	50	50	50	54
Should not	43	42	45	36
Don't know	7	8	5	10

The fourth question:

Do you think the public high schools in this community should or should not give academic credit in certain areas for work experience?

*Terry F. White, *A Study of High School Seniors, 1986* (Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa, 1986).

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Should	75	73	79	70
Should not	19	19	19	24
Don't know	6	8	2	6

Improving Services for Poor Children

A majority of the public expresses a willingness to spend more tax money to expand child development services in low-income communities. Support is particularly strong for health screening and for Head Start; support for day care for young children of working parents is less strong.

The question:

A recommendation has been made that child development services be expanded in low-income communities. As I read off each service, one at a time, would you tell me whether you would be willing or not willing to spend more taxes for that service in low-income communities?

	National Totals		
	Willing %	Not Willing %	Don't Know %
Screening young children for health problems	74	21	5
Head Start programs to help young children get a better start in school	69	25	6
Day care for young children with working parents	58	36	6

"I didn't come all the way up here to get the results of the latest poll. I thought you could dispense some wisdom of the ages."

Biggest Problems Facing Local Public Schools in 1989

Each year since 1986 drug abuse has edged higher in the public's perception of the most important problems facing local public schools. In 1986, for the first time, more respondents mentioned the use of drugs as a problem than mentioned discipline. In other respects, the 1989 responses are very similar to those given in each of the past several Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa surveys.

The question:

What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools in this community must deal?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Use of drugs	34	35	30	30
Lack of discipline	19	20	16	23
Lack of proper financial support	13	11	18	11
Poor curriculum/poor standards	8	9	9	7
Large schools/ overcrowding	8	6	11	6
Difficulty in getting good teachers	7	8	6	9
Parents' lack of interest	6	6	6	5
Integration/busing	4	3	5	7
Drinking/alcoholism	4	3	4	5
Low teacher pay	4	4	4	7
Teachers' lack of interest	4	4	6	2
Crime/vandalism	4	5	3	2
Pupils' lack of interest/ truancy	3	4	2	6
Moral standards	3	3	3	10
Lack of respect for teachers/other students	3	3	3	7
Lack of proper facilities	1	1	2	1
Mismanagement of funds/programs	1	1	2	1
Lack of needed teachers	1	1	1	1
Parents' involvement in school activities	1	1	1	2
Problems with administration	2	2	1	1
Communication problems	1	1	1	2
Lack of after-school programs	1	1	2	2
Too many schools/ declining enrollment	1	*	2	1
Transportation	1	1	1	1
Taxes are too high	1	1	*	1
Too much emphasis on sports	1	1	*	1
Peer pressure	1	1	1	*
Lack of family structure	1	1	1	2
School board politics	1	1	1	1
Teacher strikes	1	1	1	*
There are no problems	2	1	3	1
Miscellaneous	4	4	6	7
Don't know	9	10	6	4

*Less than one-half of 1%.
(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple answers.)

Illustrations by Roger T. Du Mah

Lowering Financial Barriers to College

The public has come to believe that all young people with the ability and desire to attend college should be able to do so, regardless of their financial status. Respondents to the 1989 survey strongly support making more state and federal assistance available for this purpose. Overwhelmingly, they approve more scholarships and grants, more work/study programs, and more low-interest loans.

The first question:

Many high school graduates cannot afford to attend college, although they may have the ability and desire to do so. When students have the ability and desire to attend college but not enough money, would you favor or oppose more state or federal assistance to enable them to attend?

	National Totals %	No Children in School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Favor	83	82	87	83
Oppose	13	14	11	14
Don't know	4	4	2	3

The second question:

There are several forms of state or federal assistance that might be provided to students who have the ability but not enough money to attend college. As I read off each form of assistance, one at a time, would you tell me whether you would favor or oppose providing this form of assistance?

	National Totals		
	Favor %	Oppose %	Don't Know %
More scholarships and grants	94	4	2
More work/study programs	94	3	3
More low-interest loans	93	5	2

Acknowledgments

The advisory panel for the 1989 education opinion poll consisted of the following persons: Helen Bain, associate professor of administration and supervision, Tennessee State University, Nashville; Terrel Bell, former U.S. Secretary of Education, now an author, lecturer, and consultant, Salt Lake City; Denis Doyle, senior fellow, Hudson Institute, Chevy Chase, Md.; Chester Finn, Jr., professor of education and public policy, Vanderbilt University, Washington (D.C.) office; Anne Lewis, education policy writer, Glenn Echo, Md.; Sylvia C. Pena, associate professor of education, University of Houston; and John Rowley, president, Phi Delta Kappa, and administrator, Livingston (N.J.) Public Schools. — Stanley M. Elam, coordinator, Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Poll.

Research Procedure

The Sample. The sample used in this survey embraced a total of 1,584 adults (18 years of age and older). It is described as a modified probability sample of the nation. Personal, in-home interviewing was conducted in all areas of the nation and in all types of communities. A description of the sample can be found below.

Time of Interviewing. The fieldwork for this study was carried out during the periods of 5-7 May and 9-11 June 1989.

The Report. In the tables, the heading "Nonpublic School Parents" includes parents of students who attend parochial schools and parents of students who attend private or independent schools.

Due allowance must be made for statistical variation, especially in the case of findings for groups consisting of relatively few respondents, e.g., nonpublic school parents.

The findings of this report apply only to the U.S. as a whole and not to individual communities. Local surveys, using the same questions, can be conducted to determine how local areas compare with the national norm.

Composition of the Sample

Adults	%
No children in school	68
Public school parents	28*
Nonpublic school parents	6*

*Total exceeds 32% because some parents have children attending more than one kind of school.

Sex	%
Men	49
Women	51

Race	%
White	87
Nonwhite	13

Age	%
18-29 years	23
30-49 years	42
50 and over	35

Occupation (Chief Wage Earner)	%
Business and professional	31
Clerical and sales	9
Manual labor	36
Nonlabor force	18
Farm	3
Undesignated	3

Income	%
$40,000 and over	24
$30,000-$39,999	14
$20,000-$29,999	20
$10,000-$19,999	24
Under $10,000	12
Undesignated	6

Region	%
East	25
Midwest	25
South	31
West	19

Community Size	%
1 million and over	36
500,000-999,999	8
50,000-499,999	19
2,500-49,999	10
Under 2,500	27

Education	%
College	47
High school	45
Grade school	8

Design of the Sample

The sampling procedure is designed to produce an approximation of the adult civilian population, age 18 and older, living in the U.S., except for persons in institutions such as prisons or hospitals.

A replicated probability sample is used, down to the block level in urban areas and down to segments of townships in rural areas. More than 300 sampling locations are used in each survey.

The sample design included stratification by these seven size-of-community strata, using 1980 census data: 1) incorporated cities of population 1,000,000 and over, 2) incorporated cities of population 250,000 to 999,999, 3) incorporated cities of population 50,000 to 249,999, 4) urbanized

places not included in 1 and 2, 5) cities over 2,500 population outside of urbanized areas, 6) towns and villages with populations less than 2,500, and 7) rural places not included within town boundaries. Each of these strata was further stratified into four geographic regions: East, Midwest, South, and West. Within each city-size/regional stratum, the population was arrayed in geographic order and zoned into equal-sized groups of sampling units. Pairs of localities were selected in each zone, with probability of selection of each locality proportional to its population size in the 1980 census, producing two replicated samples of localities.

Separately for each survey, within each subdivision for which block statistics are available, a sample of blocks or block clusters is drawn with probability of selection proportional to the number of dwelling units. In all other subdivisions or areas, blocks or segments are drawn at random or with equal probability.

In each cluster of blocks and each segment, a randomly selected starting point is designated on the interviewer's map of the area. Starting at this point, interviewers are required to follow a given direction in the selection of households until their assignment is completed.

Interviewing is conducted at times when adults, in general, are most likely to be at home, which means on weekends, or, if on weekdays, after 4 p.m. for women and after 6 p.m. for men.

Allowance for persons not at home is made by a "times-at-home" weighting* procedure rather than by "callbacks." This procedure is a standard method for reducing the sample bias that would otherwise result from underrepresentation in the sample of persons who are difficult to find at home.

The prestratification by regions is routinely supplemented by fitting each obtained sample to the latest available Census Bureau estimates of the regional distribution of the population. Also, minor adjustments of the sample are made by educational attainment by men and women separately, based on the annual estimates of the Census Bureau (derived from its Current Population Survey) and by age.

*A. Politz and W. Simmons, "An Attempt to Get the 'Not at Homes' into the Sample Without Callbacks," *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, March 1949, pp. 9-31.

Sampling Tolerances

In interpreting survey results, it should be borne in mind that all sample surveys are subject to sampling error, i.e., the extent to which the results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole population surveyed had been interviewed. The size of such sampling errors depends largely on the number of interviews.

The following tables may be used in estimating the sampling error of any percentage in this report. The computed allowances have taken into account the effect of the sample design upon sampling error. They may be interpreted as indicating the range (plus or minus the figure shown) within which the results of repeated samplings in the same time period could be expected to vary 95% of the time, assuming the same sampling procedure, the same interviewers, and the same questionnaire.

The first table shows how much allowance should be made for the sampling error of a percentage:

Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of a Percentage

	In Percentage Points (at 95 in 100 confidence level)* Sample Size						
	1,500	1,000	750	600	400	200	100
Percentages near 10	2	2	3	3	4	5	8
Percentages near 20	3	3	4	4	5	7	10
Percentages near 30	3	4	4	5	6	8	12
Percentages near 40	3	4	5	5	6	9	12
Percentages near 50	3	4	5	5	6	9	13
Percentages near 60	3	4	5	5	6	9	12
Percentages near 70	3	4	4	5	6	8	12
Percentages near 80	3	3	4	4	5	7	10
Percentages near 90	2	2	3	3	4	5	8

*The chances are 95 in 100 that the sampling error is not larger than the figures shown.

The table would be used in the following manner: Let us say that a reported percentage is 33 for a group that includes 1,000 respondents. We go to the row for "percentages near 30" in the table and across to the column headed "1,000."

The number at this point is 4, which means that the 33% obtained in the sample is subject to a sampling error of plus or minus four points. In other words, it is very probable (95 chances out of 100) that the true figure would be somewhere between 29% and 37%, with the most likely figure the 33% obtained.

In comparing survey results in two samples, such as, for example, men and women, the question arises as to how large a difference between them must be before one can be reasonably sure that it reflects a real difference. In the tables below, the number of points that must be allowed for in such comparisons is indicated.

Two tables are provided. One is for percentages near 20 or 80; the other, for percentages near 50. For percentages in between, the error to be allowed for lies between those shown in the two tables.

Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of the Difference

TABLE A	In Percentage Points (at 95 in 100 confidence level)* Percentages near 20 or percentages near 80					
Size of Sample	1,500	1,000	750	600	400	200
1,500	4					
1,000	4	5				
750	5	5	5			
600	5	5	6	6		
400	6	6	6	7	7	
200	8	8	8	8	9	10

TABLE B	Percentages near 50					
Size of Sample	1,500	1,000	750	600	400	200
1,500	5					
1,000	5	6				
750	6	6	7			
600	6	7	7	7		
400	7	8	8	8	9	
200	10	10	10	10	11	13

*The chances are 95 in 100 that the sampling error is not larger than the figures shown.

Here is an example of how the tables would be used: Let us say that 50% of men respond a certain way and 40% of women respond that way also, for a difference of 10 percentage points between them. Can we say with any assurance that the 10-point difference reflects a real difference between men and women on the question? Let us consider a sample that contains approximately 750 men and 750 women.

Since the percentages are near 50, we consult Table B, and, since the two samples are about 750 persons each, we look for the number in the column headed "750," which is also in the row designated "750." We find the number 7 here. This means that the allowance for error should be seven points, and that, in concluding that the percentage among men is somewhere between three and 17 points higher than the percentage among women, we should be wrong only about 5% of the time. In other words, we can conclude with considerable confidence that a difference exists in the direction observed and that it amounts to at least three percentage points.

If, in another case, men's responses amount to 22%, say, and women's to 24%, we consult Table A, because these percentages are near 20. We look in the column headed "750" and see that the number is 5. Obviously, then, the two-point difference is inconclusive.

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